

Therapy

By C. Jade Wyton

Becky Bloom has sunk into the worst Christmas blues of her life. She doesn't want to go to therapy, and is trying to do everything to avoid it— Including kicking and screaming and crying. However, it doesn't work, and she's made to go and talk to her doctor who tries to get to the bottom of her horrible holiday temper.

Contains depictions of mental illness, emotional breakdowns and outbursts, PTSD, grief, and therapy.

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Becky didn't want to go to therapy.

It wasn't working. It only made things better for a little while, and then it all got bad again. So what was the point?

She'd texted Jareth, telling him not to bother showing up to take her— But then he'd turned up anyway.

Now he sat at the foot of her bed, running a hand over her feet and ankles in a nervous attempt to comfort her.

She didn't want to admit she was glad to see him; instead she'd pouted and said she was mad he hadn't listened to her.... Even though she wasn't. And she could tell he could tell she wasn't.

He'd managed to dress her as she lay limply in bed. He'd gently slipped a clean shirt over her head, and her pants over her ankles and up to her hips....

It was weird for him to be putting clothes *on* her, instead of tearing them off her.

The entire time she'd whined and groaned and complained, saying that she was mad at him and didn't want to go to therapy.

He'd stayed gentle with her the entire time. Even when he'd brushed her hair and she's let out an animal-like growl at him. He'd just gave her a comforting *shhh* and kissed the back of her neck.

'I'm mad,' Becky mumbled into her pillow again.

'I know, babygirl,' Jareth sighed. 'But that's why you *should* go see Goodhuman.'

'No,' Becky huffed, burying her face deeper into her pillow. 'I don't want to go to therapy. I want to be a sock.'

'You can be a sock when you get home,' Jareth told her. 'But right now, you need to get up.'

'No,' Becky argued, stuffing her face under her pillow and pulling herself forward to hide under the pile of bedding at the top of her bed. 'I'm a pillow now. Pillows don't need doctors.'

'Counterpoint, Mimi is currently a pillow,' Jareth pointed out, reaching over to run a hand down the mimic's back. 'If she was feeling bad, would you say that to her?'

Becky let out a long, furious groan before quietly admitting, 'No....'

'Then I'm not going to let you say that to yourself, okay?' Jareth said, carefully pulling Becky out from under her pillows. 'I love you. And I wanna see you get better.'

'*I don't deserve you,*' Becky whined. 'You should find someone better.'

'I don't want someone better, I want you,' Jareth argued.

'I don't know *why*,' Becky grumbled. 'I'm dumb and annoying and ugly.'

'Not a single one of those things is true,' Jareth said, firmly.

'I look like a stick,' Becky pressed. 'I'm a formless pole with tits and hair.'

'You're hot.'

'*I look like my dad!*'

'Uh.... No comment?'

'Mmm...' Becky gave an unhappy groan and tried to retreat back under her pillows.... Only for Jareth to catch her around the hips and pull her back out. 'Jareth!'

'I'm *sorry*,' he said, pulling her towards the end of the bed. 'I know you don't want to, but you *have* to go to therapy.'

'No!' Becky gave an angry cry and rolled over, trying to break out of Jareth's grip. 'Let me go!'

Her flailing made both her mimics leap up and off the bed to the safety of the other side of the room, where they watched Jareth struggle to keep Becky from hiding under her bedding again from a distance.

He tried to get a grip on her, but seemed too scared of his own strength to actually get a hold— So Becky easily slipped out of his arms and rolled to the floor and under the bed.

'BECKY!' Jareth exclaimed, dropping to the ground and reaching under the bed for her. 'C'mon, baby! What are you even *doing*? You *need* to see Goodhuman.'

'No!' she repeated, trying to push him away.

'You were doing so *well* with him!' Jareth sighed, hooking a hand under her arm. 'Please don't throw it away like this!'

'Jareth! Let me go!' Becky snapped.

'I'm sorry, baby!' Jareth apologised, hefting Becky out from under the bed and sitting her up. 'I'm just doing what's right by you, I promise! You *need* to go.'

'No I don't!'

'Becky! *Please* go!'

'Jareth, I swear to *god*,' Becky growled. 'If you don't let me go I am going to throw the *biggest* tantrum!'

'No you're not—'

Becky cut Jareth off with an ear-piercing shriek and broke out of his grip, flopping angrily over onto the floor and kicking out her legs.

'Becky!'

Another shriek, this one even louder than the last, and Becky pushed Jareth away. 'NO! NO! NO! NOOOOOOOOOO!'

Jareth just sat back, stunned, as his girlfriend wailed and cried on the floor.

Becky *knew* she was being stupid, and irrational, and childish. But she couldn't *stop herself*! Knowing what she was doing just made her more upset—

And it just made her wailing worse.

About a minute passed before Becky finally went quiet and still, panting heavily and swallowing her sobs as she tried to catch her breath.

‘Okay,’ Jareth breathed, carefully leaning over to put a hand on Becky’s shoulder. ‘*Do you feel any better now?*’

‘No,’ Becky whined.

‘Hmm.... Come on, babygirl,’ Jareth pecked a kiss on her cheek, and then tried to lift her up. But she was a dead weight; heavy and limp, she refused to let him help her sit. ‘Baby, please—’

A knock sounded from Becky’s bedroom door, though Isa didn’t wait for a reply before entering.

‘Okay. Are we done murdering each other up here?’ she asked. ‘Are we ready to go?’

‘No!’ Becky gave a huff and tried to crawl back under the bed. ‘I’m not going!’

‘Oh, yes you are!’ Isa said firmly, marching over to the girl and blocking her path. ‘Get up, Rebecca. You are going to see Goodhuman.’

‘But I don’t *need* therapy anymore!’

Isa and Jareth shared a *look*, and Becky felt herself blush.

‘I don’t!’ she lied.

‘Rebecca, you are *going*,’ Isa said. ‘Even if I have to carry you to the car and drive you there myself!’

‘I’d like to see you *try*,’ Becky muttered.

For a moment, Isa stared down at her daughter. Then her eyes narrowed.

‘Alright, Rebecca, you asked for this!’ she said, rolling up her sleeves. ‘Move over, Jareth. I’m going to show you how this is done.’

Isa grabbed Becky by the back of her shirt, and Becky let out a shriek of surprise as she was half-lifted into the air with determined force. Then Isa scooped an arm around Becky’s chest, getting a better grip on the girl as she flipped her up and over her shoulder.

‘Put me down!’ Becky complained, trying to wiggle out of Isa’s grasp. ‘Isa! Isa, stop it! Put me down!’

Isa ignored Becky as she headed into the hall, Jareth and the two little mimics trailing behind them.

‘Isa! Isa let me go! I’m not going! I’m *not*!’

Isa said nothing, and simply strided confidently down the hall towards the stairs. Mimi nipped at her heel with each step, chirping and trilling loudly as it tried to get ahold of the back of her dress to climb her.... And then Don leapt up at Becky, wrapping its little spindly legs around her arm and clinging on tight.

‘*HFF!*’ Don snuffled, reaching its neck down for Mimi. ‘*GGT! GEET! GEET ON! GET ON! GRAB! GRAB!*’

‘*MIMI WILL GRAB FLAMINGLE!*’ Mimi trilled, leaping up and transforming into a scarf mid-jump. She grabbed Don, and wrapped around his neck, before sliding up him and gripping Becky’s arm tight.

‘*Alpha Becky is in trouble!*’ Don huffed. ‘*In trouble with Alpha Isa! What is going on? What is happening?*’

‘*Mama is being naughty!*’ Mimi replied. ‘*Isa is the big alpha! Above all alphas!*’

*'Even Alpha Becky?'* Don snuffled in surprise. *'Oh, no! Alpha Becky is being very naughty! Bery naubry! Brt! Brrrp!'*

The mimics continued trilling to each other; their cries growing louder and louder as Becky continued shouting and struggling and complaining.

Just as Isa reached the stairs, the door on the opposite side of the hall half-opened and Becky's father stuck his head out. He looked at the scene; Becky hefted on Isa's shoulder with two screeching mimics hanging off her as she kicked and screamed, Jareth anxiously trailing behind with Becky's phone and jacket... and then he retreated and shut his bedroom door again.

The screaming and arguing and chirping continued, all the way down the stairs and into the garage.

'Jareth, open the door,' Isa ordered, using her free hand to pull out her keys and unlock the car. 'And get in the back with Becky. You're going to keep her calm so I can drive.'

'Uh...' Jareth hurried to the car and opened it... then he hesitated, looking worried as Becky gave a loud growl, which Mimi mimicked. 'I'll... try.'

'In,' Isa told him, giving him a gentle push. Once Jareth was in the car, she deposited Becky beside him and pulled on the girl's seatbelt.

Becky immediately unbuckled it, and Isa heaved a sigh and did it up again.

Becky unbuckled it as soon as Isa's hands moved away, and the drow gave another sigh and shook her head.

She reached over again, and Becky expected her seatbelt to be done up... but instead Isa went for the mimics attached to Becky's arm.

'Come on, you two. You can't come,' Isa said, attempting to peel Mimi off Becky. 'Mimi. Let go.'

Mimi gave a trill, and Becky felt the mimic wrap tighter on her arm.

'Mimi,' Isa warned. 'Let go of Becky's arm.'

Mimi made a raspberry noise, and didn't do as it was told.

'Don?' Isa tried, only for the mimic to panic.

It let out a yelp, tightening its legs around Becky, before sticking its flamingo-like head into the mouth on its belly and nibbling nervously on itself.

'I'm too tired for this,' Isa said, shaking her head. 'I guess they're coming.... Becky. Seatbelt.'

'No,' Becky grumbled.

'Rebecca—'

'I don't want to go!' Becky complained as Isa rebuckled her seatbelt. 'I *hate* Goodhuman!'

'Do you really?' Isa asked, raising a brow. 'Why is that?'

'He makes me *think* about stuff!' Becky whined, making to unbuckle the belt again but flinching away when Isa smacked her hand. 'And he's always *right*! And I don't like it!'

Jareth pursed his lips tight, and shifted in his seat, and Becky wasn't sure if he was trying to look sympathetic or if he was holding back a laugh.

'So you don't like him because he's good at what he does?' Isa asked. 'You hate him, because he does the thing you hired him to do?'

'Yeah,' Becky huffed. '*Exactly*.'

'*Make it make sense*,' Isa sighed before standing up straight and closing the

car door.

Becky immediately undid her seatbelt and tried to escape; only to find Isa had turned on the child-lock.

'Fuck!' she cursed, turning around in her seat and clambering over Jareth to the other door.

'Babe!' he exclaimed.

*It was locked, too.*

'Dammit!' Becky swore again, before giving a loud sigh of defeat.

*She wasn't getting out of this....*

Isa had won, like always, and she'd kicked up a fuss and made herself look stupid for *nothing*.

'Come here, baby,' Jareth's soft voice whispered, and Becky felt his arms wrapping around her waist and pulling her close. 'It's gonna be alright.'

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The car ride had been uneventful.

Once Becky had realised Isa wasn't going to let her out of seeing Goodhuman, she'd relented and let Jareth buckle her in.

The hour-long drive felt like it went an entire month.

Her phone was boring. The radio was boring. Mimi and Don had decided to take a nap. And Becky was too embarrassed to try and start a conversation.

All she could think to do to entertain herself was bother Jareth by poking at various parts of his body— Which seemed to amuse him, and he'd poked her back several times.

And then once they actually got there, there was more waiting.... Half an hour of it, before Isa had gone in to speak with Goodhuman privately.

That was about five minutes ago.

Becky wasn't sure what, exactly, she was telling him about....

Her tantrum and the struggle to get her here?

The emotional outburst the other day, where she'd smashed the photo of her mother?

Her fight with Portia?

Literally anything else she'd done this week...?

Don gave a heavy sigh, and Becky pet his head.

They weren't supposed to have animals in the waiting room. But upon seeing the struggle to remove the mimics from Becky's arm, the nurse had made an exception for her. As long as they behaved.

Which, surprisingly, both of them did.

Not that it was surprising for Don to behave (he always seemed to be a gentleman in public), but Mimi didn't growl or nip or try to cause a fuss even *once* while in the waiting room.

Jareth had joked that it was because he was there. Though, from what she heard Mimi chirping to Don, she thought that might have actually been the case.

The training that Jareth had done with Mimi had stuck even now, months later, and the mimic was trying its best to stay "polite and calm" while outside.

Becky glanced up at Jareth, who grinned at her and ran a hand through her

hair.

‘How you feeling?’ he asked.

Becky blew a loud raspberry, which she cut short as she saw Isa coming down the hall.

The drow looked worried as she came and sat beside Becky.

‘Becky?’

‘Ilhar?’ Becky mumbled.

‘He’s ready for you.’

‘Okay...’ Becky heaved a sigh and pushed herself to her feet.

She pecked a kiss on Jareth’s lips, and another on Isa’s cheek, before dragging her feet towards Goodhuman’s office.

The door was closed, so she knocked twice.

‘Come in, Rebecca,’ Goodhuman called through the door. When Becky entered, he motioned to the very familiar chair in front of his desk. ‘Take a seat.’

Begrudgingly, Becky did as she was told. She sat down with a huff and crossed her arms, looking at Goodhuman’s desk instead of his face, and examining everything he had decorating it.... Her eyes fell on a single ornament. A little green Christmas tree.

Christmas.

Becky felt herself scowling.

‘Hm...’ Goodhuman followed Becky’s eye, before he scribbled something down on his notepad. ‘So... Isa’s just told me you were at the Whitewood estate massacre.’

Becky’s lips tightened, and she gripped her pant leg tightly in her fist.

Is that what they were calling it? A massacre?

‘She’s worried about how its affecting you,’ Goodhuman continued. ‘She says you’ve seemed very confused, and have been lashing out since coming home.’

Becky didn’t reply; instead she focused on staring at the little ceramic Christmas tree he had on his desk.

She hated Christmas.

‘What you’re feeling is a perfectly natural response to what you witnessed,’ Goodhuman reassured. ‘You’re under a lot of stress.... How have you been sleeping?’

Poorly, Becky thought, though she didn’t say it out loud. *She’d been doing everything she could to avoid going to sleep....*

‘Any nightmares?’

‘I *always* have nightmares,’ Becky muttered, dryly.

Goodhuman wrote it down. ‘Have you had nightmares about what happened at the house?’ he clarified.

Slowly, Becky nodded. ‘I keep thinking about... if we did things better. Smarter. Maybe we could have gotten Malinka home without anyone getting hurt.’

‘Mm.’

‘Maybe if we hadn’t rushed into it, and come more prepared....’

‘What happened was not your fault.’

‘Yes it was,’ Becky gave a sniff.

‘You didn’t kill those people,’ Goodhuman said, simply. ‘They were dangerous

people who put themselves at risk. You were just in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and witnessed something that would have happened even if you weren't there.... You haven't hurt anyone.'

Becky shifted uncomfortably and looked up, then, casting Goodhuman a firm frown that said everything she wanted it to.

'Ah,' he leant back in his hair. 'I see....'

'*He had a gun,*' Becky said, gritting her teeth as she felt another tear escape the corner of her eye. 'He was going to shoot Adam. I didn't think. All I thought was that he was there. He was between me and my friends.... I didn't mean for him to *die*. I was just trying to knock him out or something. But he fell wrong.'

'I see.'

Becky went back to staring at the tree. 'I'm evil.'

'You're not evil,' Goodhuman reassured. 'You were trying to protect your friends. That's not evil.'

'Mm...' Becky gave an unhappy whine, and continued to glare at the tree ornament as Goodhuman wrote more notes.

'Okay,' Goodhuman gave a gentle sigh. 'It's clear you don't want to talk about this.... Is there anything else on your mind?'

'*Mama!*' Mimi chirped. '*Tell Doctor about Mama's fight!*'

'*I'm not telling him about the fight,*' Becky whispered back— Though clearly not quiet enough as Goodhuman leant forward intently.

'What fight?'

Becky bit her lip, and looked away sheepishly. She played with a stray strand of fabric from her pants for a moment before sighing loudly and responding, 'I punched Portia.'

Goodhuman looked surprised. 'Why did you do that?'

'I dunno,' Becky said. 'She wouldn't leave me alone. So I called her a freak. And childish. And unpopular. And then I felt bad about it, so I punched her.'

'Uhuh... and how did punching her fix the problem?'

'She's too nice to throw the first punch,' Becky crossed her arms. 'And she deserved to beat me up, after what I said to her. So I punched her, and was going to let her do whatever. But Jareth and Benny stopped it.'

'I see,' Goodhuman cleared his throat and made a note. 'Did you apologise to her?'

'No,' Becky admitted. 'We haven't spoken. I really miss her.... Should I call her?'

'Do you think you should?'

Becky bit her lip, and thought for a long, long moment.

'Hmm...' she gave a tentative hum. 'Not until I feel better, I don't think. I don't want to yell at her again.... But also I don't want her to think I hate her.... I could text her?'

'Would you like my help with that?' Goodhuman asked.

Becky shook her head, and went back to staring at the Christmas tree. 'Jareth knows her. He can help.'

'Alright,' Goodhuman nodded. Then, he looked at his clock. 'We still have quite a bit of time. Is there anything else you want to talk about?'

'No,' Becky lied. She knew she should tell him about her tantrum the other

day. But she didn't want to.

'Nothing at all?'

'No.'

'Not even something good?'

'No. I want to sit here and *not talk*,' Becky declared, careful to avoid squishing her mimics as she crossed her arms.

'Alright,' Goodhuman gave a nod, and started to flick through his notes. 'Just tell me if you change your mind.'

'Hmp,' Becky huffed, looking back down to the tree.

God, she hated Christmas.

She fucking *hated* Christmas....

With its stupid everything.

Stupid music. Stupid food. Stupid presents, and fake love, and gaudy decorations!

Stupid— Stupid *trees*!

Becky felt her anger boil over and, though she desperately tried to stop herself, she batted Goodhuman's ornament off his desk and onto the floor with a firm swipe of her hand.

It didn't shatter, but Goodhuman's eyes widened in surprise and he raised his brow.

'Excuse me?' he managed.

Becky realised what she'd just done, and felt her cheeks flushing pink as she hurriedly looked away.

'What on *Earth* was that for?'

'Christmas is stupid,' Becky huffed childishly.

'You think so?'

'Yeah. It's for children,' Becky said. 'It's dumb for adults to care about it.'

'Lots of things are for children,' Goodhuman said. 'And adults can still enjoy them. I know you collect plush toys. Aren't those for children?'

'Yeah, but that's different!'

'How so?'

'Plush toys are actually, like, *good*,' Becky said, knowing she sounded ridiculous. 'And not stupid like Christmas is.'

'Hmm...' Goodhuman put his hands to his chin in a pensive manner and thought for a long, long moment. 'Rebecca, would you indulge me in a game?'

'What *kind* of game?' Becky asked, slowly.

'A word game,' he explained. 'About association.'

'Association?'

'Yes,' Goodhuman gave a nod. 'It's rather simple. I say a word, and you say the first thing that comes to your mind when I do. What do you think?'

'Hmm...' Becky wasn't sure why Goodhuman wanted to play a game with her.... It seemed like a strange thing to do, halfway through a therapy session.... Maybe he just wanted to cheer her up or something before she left? Probably just that. 'Okay.... I *guess*.'

'Wonderful, thank you,' Goodhuman gave a warm smile, and cleared his throat. 'Dog?'

'Mm.... Cat,' Becky replied, slowly.

Goodhuman nodded, and began writing in his notebook. 'Tree?' he said.

'Climb,' said Becky, a little quicker than before.

'Woods?'

'Safe.'

'*Interesting....*'

'Uh... history,' Becky responded, realising only afterwards that Goodhuman's mumbling hadn't been a prompt.

He wrote down her answer, anyway, before continuing. 'Rat?'

'Racist.'

Goodhuman's brow furrowed at that, but just for a moment before his expression returned to neutral. 'Love?'

'Sex.'

'Pen?'

'Draw.'

'Christmas?'

'Birthday—' Becky froze, realising what she'd just said. Then she gave a frustrated groan.

Goodhuman looked intrigued, as he continued to write. 'It is your birthday soon, isn't it?'

'The uh... the twenty-eighth,' Becky admitted, before frowning at Goodhuman. 'You tricked me.'

'No,' Goodhuman said, simply. 'We're just playing the game. But if you feel like I've tricked you, we can stop.'

'Hmm...' Becky glared at the doctor for a moment, before giving a heavy, annoyed sigh. 'No,' she huffed. 'It's kinda fun.'

'Good, I'm glad,' Goodhuman smiled, and nodded. 'Alright.... Chair?'

'Sit.'

'Happy?'

'Hug.'

'Lie?'

'Dad.'

'Hm...' Goodhuman underlined that one. 'Home?'

'Bed.'

'School?'

'Boring.'

'Sad?'

'Cheese.'

Goodhuman let out a chuckle. 'I'm sorry,' he quickly composed himself. 'I wasn't expecting that one.'

'Neither was I,' Becky admitted.

'Ahem.... Book?'

'Stupid.'

'Phone?'

'Help.'

Another underline. 'Bird?'

'Malinka.'

'Cute?'

‘Mimic.’

‘Rain?’

‘Yellow.’

‘Hmhm.... Light?’

‘Dark.’

‘Date?’

‘Fries.’

‘Birthday?’

‘Mum,’ Becky answered— Then swore loudly. ‘Stop *tricking* me!’

‘I’m not tricking you,’ Goodhuman promised. ‘Why do you think I’m tricking you?’

‘I dunno! You just are.’

‘Alright,’ Goodhuman raised his hands in a submissive gesture. ‘My intention wasn’t to trick you, but I understand why you feel that way.... How about we take a break from the game?’

‘Mm... okay,’ Becky sighed, looking away from Goodhuman again.

Her eyes fell back to the Christmas ornament, sitting forgotten on the floor, and she felt a bubble of guilt form in her stomach.

A moment of quiet passed, before she reached down to pick it up.

‘Sorry,’ she mumbled, putting it back in its place on the desk.

‘Thank you,’ said Goodhuman.

More silence.

Well, silence except the chirping of Mimi and Don; both of whom were licking Becky’s arm so much it was starting to go red.

She pet the mimics down their backs, their voices fading in and out as they chattered to each other.

They were saying something about comforting Becky, which she thought was very, very sweet.

‘*Good babies,*’ she said, softly. ‘You’re both such good babies. Yes you are. I love you. I do.’

Goodhuman gave a light chuckle, and motioned to the mimics. ‘Which one is Mimi?’

‘This one,’ Becky said, scratching down Mimi’s seam. ‘Careful, though. She bites.’

‘Yes, I remember you saying,’ Goodhuman said. ‘And who is this other one? Last time we talked you only had Mimi.’

‘This is Don,’ Becky explained, putting a hand under Don’s chest and gently lifting him. ‘He was a stray, and followed me home. He’s a big sweetheart.’

Don obediently let go of her arm, and she placed him on Goodhuman’s desk. He sat, panting contently and looking between Becky and Goodhuman, before licking its lips and giving a heavy sigh that leaked drool down its chin.

‘Does he bite?’ Goodhuman asked, hovering a hand over Don’s back.

‘We haven’t had him long enough to say for *sure,*’ Becky said. ‘But he hasn’t bitten anyone yet. It should be fine to pat him.’

Goodhuman lowered his hand, stroking Don down its back.

Don gave a trill and a shiver, and then shook itself out; globs of spit flinging in all directions.

‘He’s rather *wet*,’ Goodhuman commented.

‘Yeah. He’s uh.... I think there’s something wrong with him,’ Becky said, picking Don up and carefully depositing him on her shoulder, where he was quickly joined by Mimi. ‘With his breed and how friendly he is with people, I’ve been wondering if he used to be a pet, and got dumped because of his health issues.’

‘Well, now he’s lucky to have you. Isn’t he?’ Goodhuman gave Becky a warm smile.

‘I hope so,’ Becky grinned, wincing and leaning to the side as she felt two wet tongues start to fight for her ear. ‘Hey! Don’t—’

She quickly removed the two mimics, placing them in her lap, and took to petting them as they curled up together.

Then another moment of quiet yawned between Becky and Goodhuman, and Becky swallowed.

Goodhuman was watching her casually, obviously waiting for her to say something....

But she wasn’t sure what to talk about, now.

Goodhuman cast another glance to his clock, before picking up his notebook again.

‘Rebecca,’ he started. ‘I would like to talk to you about something serious, if you’re feeling up to it.’

‘Uh...’ Becky shifted in her seat, averting her gaze. ‘Um... what kind of serious?’

‘Diagnosis serious,’ he said.

‘You mean there’s something *else* wrong with me?’ Becky blurted. ‘*Mmm....* What is it?’

‘Well, I’ve been thinking on this for a while...’ Goodhuman began to scribble down notes, and cross out others. ‘I didn’t want to make a formal diagnosis until I was sure, but after our talks today, I’m thinking it’s the right call.’

‘Yeah?’

‘I believe you’re suffering from post traumatic stress disorder,’ he said. ‘Do you know what that is?’

‘No.’

‘PTSD?’

‘Oh, like. The war disease?’

‘It’s not a disease,’ Goodhuman corrected. ‘But it *is* common in veterans. When people are repeatedly exposed to traumatic events, or when they suffer a particularly large traumatic event, there’s a chance that their fight or flight response will become sensitive to triggers.... From what you’ve told me you’ve suffered quite a lot of trauma. And they’ve been quite large traumas, at that.’

‘Hmm...’ Becky nodded.

PTSD....

She’d have to ask Adam to help her look that up, when he got home from his family’s reunion.

‘Now, from what I’ve heard from Isa and your father, you’ve been doing quite well at managing your triggers,’ said Goodhuman. ‘But it’s clear to me that Christmas is a trigger for you. And I think that the holiday combined with the

events you witnessed at Whitewood have exacerbated your condition rather severely.'

'Exacerbated?' Becky cocked her head, confused.

'Intensified,' Goodhuman clarified. 'Made worse.'

'Oh... yeah,' Becky agreed. 'I've felt really *really* bad, lately....'

'Yes,' Goodhuman agreed. 'Now.... I'd like to discuss Christmas, with you.'

'Why? I'm never going to like Christmas,' Becky grumbled. 'Everyone always tries to get me to like it. But I'm never gonna find it fun....'

'And that's alright,' said Goodhuman. 'I want to find out *why* it's a trigger, so we can try to lessen its negative affects on your mental state.... Help you feel *neutral* about the holiday. You can't lock yourself away every year. And you can't continue to lash out at others.'

'Hmp,' Becky shrugged. 'Can't you just, like... stick a pen through my head into my brain and make me stop feeling things?'

'That's called a lobotomy,' said Goodhuman. 'And no, I cannot do that.'

'Why not?'

'They're illegal, for one,' he told her. 'And two. You deserve better than being braindead.'

'No I *don't*,' Becky pouted.

'I assure you, you do deserve better,' said Goodhuman. He flicked through his notes for a moment before clicking his tongue. 'You've never mentioned any holiday-related trauma to me before.... How long has Christmas been an issue for you?'

'I dunno,' Becky answered. 'Years, I guess. Ever since....'

Goodhuman leant forward as Becky trailed off, but said nothing.

It was like there was a wall in her brain, blocking her off from completing the thought she'd had.

Ever since what? Becky asked herself. *What was it?*

They never stayed for your birthday, her brain told her.

'I don't like my birthday, either,' Becky said, slowly, giving Goodhuman time to write it down. 'Mum and Dad would come home for Christmas, but then have to leave again before my birthday. It used to make me really mad.'

'They never stayed for your birthday?' Goodhuman asked. 'Why not?'

'They had work,' Becky said. 'Every year, they could only get a few days off during the Christmas holidays. But then they'd have to leave again, straight away. And they weren't able to stay home for my birthday. I think the first time they were able to stay was after Mum—'

She cut off, feeling every hair on her body stand on end as she remembered.

She remembered that horrible, horrible night....

'*After Mum found out she was dying,*' Becky whispered, feeling tears welling in her eyes as Goodhuman gave a sympathetic nod. 'It was my birthday that I found out. I'd had a bad dream, and I... think I wet the bed? Nobody was upstairs to help me change it so I went looking for them in the lounge.... Mum was crying, so I hid by the door and listened, and....'

Becky felt sick. Deep, deep down in her stomach.

'I see,' Goodhuman said. 'You connect your mother's illness with your birthday.'

‘And my birthday with Christmas,’ Becky realised aloud. ‘Wow.... *Hm*.... I don’t like that.’

‘I’d be surprised if you did,’ said Goodhuman. ‘It’s alright, though. Now that we know, we can work to manage your emotions properly.’

‘Mm,’ Becky shifted again, and busied herself with petting her mimics.

Goodhuman watched this, before asking, ‘You like animals, don’t you? You find them grounding?’

‘Yeah,’ Becky confirmed. ‘They help me think better.’

‘Hmm... have you considered getting a assistant animal?’ Goodhuman asked. ‘I could recommend a good organisation that provides them.’

‘Assistant animal?’ Becky asked.

‘An animal trained to help you with day-to-day functions,’ Goodhuman explained. ‘What they do is different for each person, but for many it’s things such as recognising you’re being affected by a trigger and providing contact cues for mental grounding, panic attack interruption, and helping with emotional management and focusing on tasks.... Some even do things such as retrieving medication, or closing doors behind their owners.’

‘Dad could use that one,’ Becky joked. ‘But Mimi would *never* let me get another animal. She’s too much of a spoilt little stinker— Aren’t you?’

‘*Brrp!*’ Mimi trilled happily.

‘She seems fine with Don,’ Goodhuman pointed out.

‘Yeah, only cos he’s her boyfriend,’ said Becky. ‘She can be really reactive to other animals, though. I wouldn’t be able to get another pet.’

‘Well, it’s not uncommon to train an animal you already own,’ Goodhuman suggested. ‘It can be a little harder, once they’re set in their ways, but it’s definitely possible. I wouldn’t say Mimi is suitable, with her aggression. But Don is quite well behaved, isn’t he?’

‘You think I should train Don to be a... uh...?’

‘Assistant animal,’ Goodhuman finished. ‘I can’t say for sure if he’d be suitable, but I *do* think an assistance animal is something that would benefit you.’

Becky gave an awkward nod, and scratched Don under his beak. ‘Did you hear that, Don? You might be getting an important job helping me. Do you think you could do that?’

Don gave a very wet snuffle of surprise before sitting up straight and giving a happy gurgle. It looked *very* proud of itself.

‘Now, we’re getting to the end of our time,’ said Goodhuman, glancing at the clock again. ‘If you don’t mind, I’d like to formally document your diagnosis for you. And, if your willing to try it, I can write a referral for an organisation that will help you trial assistance animal training for Don.’

‘Okay,’ Becky gave a nod, her focus shifting back to the animals in her lap. ‘I think.... Yeah. I think we could try that!’

‘Good, good,’ Goodhuman opened a drawer in his desk, and pulled out a couple of forms. ‘Now. How are you feeling?’

‘Better,’ Becky admitted. ‘Thanks, Mr Goodhuman.’

—END—

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